

PROXIES FOR YOUTHS AND ADULTS: COMMUNICATION AND REPORTS OF JOB SEARCH¹

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This study has its roots in three lines of research. The first investigates the accuracy of proxy reporting. Moore (1988) pointed out that few studies of proxies' ability to report well could separate effects of self-selection to proxy-reporting status from proxying itself. In the present study, family members proxy for each other, eliminating self-selection as each subject acts both as a self-reporter and as a proxy, and enabling self and proxy responses to be compared.

Second, this study is in the tradition of investigating the effects of proxy reporting specific to the Current Population Survey (CPS). Because of the policy and research importance of the CPS and because some 50% of its responses are by proxy, there has been a long history of research on proxy reporting in the CPS. Some of the studies randomly assigned subjects to self- and proxy-reporting conditions (e.g. Wakesberg and Pearl, 1965; Cowan, Roman, Wolter, and Woltman, 1979; Roman, 1981) obviating the problem of self selection. Roman (1981) summarized the findings: self-responders produced a slightly higher unemployment rate than did those for whom the CPS respondent rule was followed. An earlier study (Williams, 1969) used a design similar to ours, in which all available household members were interviewed for themselves in month one; a month later two family members acted as household respondents, giving data for both the current and previous month and both for themselves and other household members. Thus, the experiment was able to derive differences between self and proxy reports for the same subjects in month two, as well as tests of recall (and recall plus proxy effect) by comparing month one responses with month two responses about month one. More recent research, using the CPS reinterview data in which, for quality control, a subsample of the CPS sample is reinterviewed about a week after the initial interview (e.g. O'Muircheartaigh, 1986; Tanur and Lee, 1993) also attacked the problem of self selection. But using reinterview data incurs a cost of having one of the responses longer removed from the reference period than the other. Further, while self-selection into proxy-self categories is eliminated, self-selection into

more complicated categories (e.g. self on initial interview, proxy on reinterview) may still be confounded with the effects of proxying. Thus the need for a study of proxy reporting in the CPS totally free of self-selection bias.

Third, this study represents a contribution to basic research to fill a gap in the literature. A program of research (e.g. Tanur and Lee 1992; 1993; Tanur, Lee, and Shin 1992; Tanur and Shin 1990a; 1990b) examined reporting of job searches by youths and the adults who proxy for them in the Current Population Survey (CPS), and possible impact of reporting differences on youth's unemployment rate. A better understanding of this differential reporting has been hampered by a lack of basic knowledge of intra-household communication patterns. Family communication has been studied, but most often from a family-systems viewpoint where the conversation content is less important than the meta-messages that the conversation transmits. Thus it is hard to find research that addresses the actual substance of what families talk about and the accuracy with which information is transmitted.

This research, conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), aims at all three of these issues. It focuses on communication within the family about issues on which proxies report in the CPS. Family members answered CPS questions about themselves and each other and reported how they learned about the other's activities. In this paper, we compare the communication between young people and their proxies with communication between older people and their proxies and investigate whether any differences in these communication patterns are consequential for reports of job search on the CPS.

Method

Overview of Design

All CPS-eligible members, i.e., those over 16 years, from 97 households completed a computerized self-administered questionnaire that included questions from the CPS. Household members completed interviews independently and simultaneously on individual personal computers, reporting information for themselves and all other eligible members of their household. For each proxy report about another household member, respondents also answered questions on how they learned about that person's labor force activities and their recent

¹ All views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or policies of the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

interaction with and knowledge of that person's labor force activities. Self-reporters also indicated how the proxy would have learned about their labor force activities.

Subjects

Data collection was done by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Tennessee (UT). UT conducted a random digit dialing telephone survey of 400 Knox county residents in which questions were asked to determine the size of the household and willingness of members to participate in the study, as well as demographic questions. A sample of households was drawn from this initial screening, comprising households of different sizes and characteristics. Because there were insufficient numbers of three and four person households from the RDD screening, extensive efforts were made to recruit families with the desired characteristics. Data from three households were lost completely due to software or hardware problems. Although attempts were made to obtain a sample that reflected the diversity and characteristics of Knox County, Tennessee, this sample was not intended to be representative of that county, let alone of the CPS population.

The focus of the present study is a comparison of parents reporting as proxies for youths (less than 25 years of age) with adults in the household (over 25 years of age) reporting for each other. Thus our analyses include 104 youth self-reports with parents as proxies and 198 adults over age 25 reporting for each other. An individual may be represented in more than one self-proxy pair. In this preliminary analysis, we ignore such dependencies in our data.

The Current Population Survey

The CPS is the primary household survey for determining labor force status in the United States. Of particular interest in the present investigation was the question on the CPS concerning whether the target person had looked for work in the last 4 weeks. Because of the small sample size and the relative rarity of respondents who were asked this question (respondents who were employed and not on layoff -- about 2/3 of the sample -- were not asked this question), we asked two additional questions, not part of the CPS, about looking for work. All self-respondents who had not been asked the four week looking for work question were asked if they had ever looked for work. If they had ever looked for work, they were asked when they last looked for work and what job search activities they had carried out. Similarly, all proxy reporters were asked these "ever looked" questions about the target person, if they had not been asked the "looking for work in the last 4 weeks" question about that person.

Measures of Communication or Transmission Mode

We measured the source of information by asking proxies how they learned about the job search activities of another household member. Proxy reporters were presented with a list of possible ways they could have learned about the target person's job search, and asked to select as many as applied. The possibilities included: the target telling them, participating with the target, hearing from others, noticing the target's activities, reading information, and using their general knowledge of the target. Proxy reporters could also indicate that their answer was merely a guess. Self-reporters were asked how likely it was that each proxy reporter knew of their looking for work. If the self-reporter said that the proxy reporter was at least somewhat likely to know about his/her job search activities, she/he was also asked how she/he thought proxy reporters would know this, and was given the same list of communication/transmission modes (except for guessing). The self and proxy reporters who were asked the ever looked for work question were asked slightly different transmission mode questions referring to their knowledge of the *methods* of job search, whereas the four week question concerned their knowledge of the job search itself.

Measures of Relationship Characteristics

We also included some slightly modified items to measure important dimensions of interpersonal relationships (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989). Household members estimated the amount of time they spent with each other during the past week and whether they engaged in a variety of different activities with each other during the past week. We also collected information about the type of relationship, e.g., spouse, parent-youth, and other relative, etc.

Results

Overview

The analyses were conducted in four phases. First, we examined agreement between self and proxy reporters on the target's job search within the past three years, analyzing completeness and accuracy of proxy reports relative to the self report. Second, we looked for differences in transmission/communication modes used by parents proxying for youths compared to adults proxying for other adults. Third, we examined differences in the relationship characteristics of parent-youth versus adult-adult relationships, focusing on the amount of time spent together and the number of activities done together. Finally, we investigated the degree to which differences in the transmission/communication mode and amount of interaction were related to accuracy and completeness of reporting of job search for youth and adult targets.

Proxy Accuracy and Completeness

Due to the small size of this sample, reduced even further by our concentration on particular kinds of dyads, we had to look at job searches more broadly than is done

in the CPS, which focuses on the past four weeks, or in the past year (for potentially discouraged workers). We broadened the time frame to cover the past 3 years to set a time period that would still permit adequate recall. The self-reports of job search within the past three years are in Table 1. Over 40% of the youths and adults indicated that they had looked for work at some point during the last three years. We examined self-proxy agreement for the specific time period of the job search. For youth targets, 68% of the proxies agreed that there was job search in the same time period as the self-reporters specified (or that there had been no job search in the past three years). The corresponding figure for adult targets was 73%. Table 2 shows the self and proxy reports as simply the presence or absence of search during the past three years, and shows the agreement between self and proxy reports of search. Table 2 does not include the self-proxy discrepancies in the time period of the search and has an overall agreement between the self and proxy reporters of about 80% for both youth and adult targets. For summary purposes, we utilized the self-report as the standard and computed the proxy's accuracy (hits as a percentage of hits and false alarms) and completeness (hits as a percentage of hits and misses) for reporting the target person's job search; these rates are also given in Table 2. We see that there is little difference between youth and adult targets in either accuracy or completeness.

Communication/Transmission Modes

Previous research on self and proxy reporting has pointed to the importance of the communication and participation between the self and proxy on self-proxy agreement (e.g., Menon, Bickart, Sudman, & Blair, 1995). The frequency that different communication or transmission modes were reported to be utilized by adult targets, youth targets and by those proxying for them are shown in Table 3. Adult self-reporters indicated that they told the proxy and the proxy participated with them in job search more frequently than did youth self-reporters. Adult proxy reporters also reported that they more often learned of the target persons job search through the target telling them or by participating with them if the target person was an adult than if the target was a youth. In contrast, adult proxy reporters reported that they guessed or heard from someone else about a youth's job search more often than an adult's job search.

Relationship Characteristics

Social psychologists studying close relationships have described the closeness of a relationship in terms of the frequency and diversity of interactions between two people (Berscheid et al., 1989). The amount of time adult-adult and youth-adult self/proxy

pairs spent together and the number of different activities that they did together during the week prior to the survey as reported by the proxy are shown in Table 4. Adult-adult pairs report that they spent significantly more time together the past weekend and did significantly more activities together during the past week than did youth-adult pairs. There were no significant differences in the amount of time spent together during the past week.

Communication/Transmission Mode and Relationship Characteristics Related to Proxy Accuracy and Completeness

These differences in communication or transmission mode and relationship characteristics between youth/adult and adult/adult dyads point to possible differences in usefulness or effectiveness of the different means by which adult proxies learn information about adult and youth targets. We examined the degree to which the different communication or transmission modes were related to the completeness and accuracy of proxy reports for youth and adult targets. Only the communication/transmission modes as reported by the target person were used in these analyses because the proxies did not provide communication/transmission modes if they did not report a job search by the target person.

As can be seen in Table 5, for adult targets, telling the proxy about a job search was positively related to the proxy's completeness and accuracy of reporting. The proxy's participation with the target in the job search and the proxy noticing the target person's job search activities were also positively related to the accuracy of reporting for adult targets. For youth targets, the target telling the proxy was significantly positively related to proxy accuracy but not to completeness. The target person reporting that the proxy generally knew about his or her job search was also marginally positively related to proxy completeness of reporting for youth targets. Several of the communication modes were utilized so seldom, i.e., by less than 10 percent of the self reporters, that, given the small sample size, the results should be taken with a great deal of caution. These cells are shaded in Table 5.

To analyze the relation between the relationship characteristics and the completeness and accuracy of proxy reporting, median splits of the amount of time and number of activities were done separately for each self-proxy pair group. As can be seen in Table 6, the characteristics of the relationship for adult-adult pairs were not significantly related to the completeness and accuracy of proxy reporting; however, the amount of time spent together on weekends was positively related to the completeness and accuracy of adults reporting for youth targets. The number of different activities done together was also positively related to the accuracy of adult proxying for youth.

Conclusions

The present study addresses a gap in the literature on adult proxy reporting about youth job search in the CPS. While designed to help fill the gap in the understanding how family communication affects proxy reporting, this study uses procedures that differ from those standard for the CPS; hence the results must be generalized with care.

Because of the small sample, we utilized a broader time period of job search than is typical in the CPS to examine some of the potentially important aspects of the communication and interaction between household members that could influence the accuracy and completeness of their proxy reporting. We also included more than one person's report from a household in the analysis. In addition, the CPS questions were self-administered in this study, not interviewer administered as they are in practice.

Although we observed only slight differences between the completeness and accuracy of adult proxy reports about adult and youth job search, we did uncover relatively large differences in the modes through which the proxies learned about the target's job search as well as the amount of time they spent with the target person and the number of activities they did together. These differences in communication and interaction were differentially related to proxy completeness and accuracy for the adult and youth targets. Communication and transmission modes of telling, participating, and noticing were more frequently utilized in the adult-adult pairs and were related to greater accuracy of reporting by the proxy for those targets. These communication modes showed similar trends for adults reporting for youth targets, but only telling was statistically significant. In contrast, the analyses of relationship characteristics showed that adult-adult pairs spent significantly more time together on weekends and engaged in more activities together in a one week period than did youth-adult pairs; however, the amount of interaction was related to the accuracy of reporting only for youth targets. Thus, in predicting proxy accuracy for adult targets, it is important to know the mode by which the adult proxy learned the information about job search; for youth targets, the mode may also be an important indicator, but the relationship between the youth and adult proxy is clearly very important.

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Table 1. Self Reports of Job Search in the Past Three Years

Time Period of Job Search	Adults N=198	Youths N=102
Last 4 weeks	5%	6%
Between 4 weeks and 1 year	23%	25%
2 to 3 years	15%	13%
Not in last 3 years	58%	56%

Table 2. Self and Proxy Agreement on Reports of Job Search in the Past Three Years

	Youth Target		Adult Target	
	Proxy Report	of search	Proxy Report	of search
Self-Report of search	No	Yes	No	Yes
No	49	8	92	22
Yes	12	33	18	66

Completeness: 73.3% Accuracy: 80.5% Completeness: 78.6% Accuracy: 75.0%

Table 3. Use of Transmission Modes by Self and Proxy Reporters for Adult and Youth Targets .

Transmission Modes	Adult Target	Youth Target
As reported by the Self	N=197	N=104
Told	58.4%	45.2%*
Other Told	4.6%	5.8%
Participated	30.5%	4.8%**
Noticed	35.0%	21.2%
Read	6.1%	0%
Knows	26.9%	22.1%
As reported by the Proxy	N=197	N=102
Guess	12.2%	26.5%**
Told	54.8%	30.4%**
Other Told	3.6%	12.8%**
Participated	27.4%	7.8%**
Noticed	34.5%	28.4%
Read	6.6%	4.9%
Knows	24.4%	14.7%+

** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ + $p < .10$

Table 4. Relationship Characteristics for Adult-Adult and Youth-Adult pairs.

Relationship Characteristics	Adult-Adult	Youth-Adult
Weekend Time Spent Together**	N=198	N=103
No time	3.5%	3.9%
less than 1 hour	5.1%	2.9%
1 hour to less than 3 hours	12.6%	29.1%
3 hours to less than 7 hours	27.3%	35.9%
7 hours to less than 15 hours	28.3%	16.5%
15 hours or more	23.2%	11.7%
Weekday Time Spent Together	N=196	N=103
No time	2.6%	1.9%
less than 1 hour	4.6%	6.8%
1 hour to less than 3 hours	18.9%	30.1%
3 hours to less than 7 hours	38.8%	29.1%
7 hours to less than 15 hours	21.9%	18.4%
15 hours or more	13.2%	13.6%
Mean Number of Activities done Together**	8.1	5.7

** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ + $p < .10$, based on chi-square tests for time spent together and on a t-test for activities done together.

Table 5. Transmission Mode and the Completeness and Accuracy of Proxy Reporting of Youth and Adult Job Search.

Transmission Mode	Completeness			
	Adult Target Did Not Use	Used	Youth Target Did Not Use	Used
Told	57.1% (21)	85.7%** (63)	71.4% (14)	74.2% (31)
Other Told	78.2% (78)	83.3% (6)	73.2% (41)	75.0% (4)
Participated	79.6% (49)	77.1% (35)	73.2% (41)	75.0% (4)
Noticed	75.0% (44)	82.5% (40)	71.4% (35)	80.0% (10)
Read	76.9% (78)	100.0% (6)	73.3% (45)	--- (0)
Knows	78.0% (59)	80.0% (25)	66.7% (33)	91.7%+ (12)

Transmission Mode	Accuracy			
	Adult Target Did Not Use	Used	Youth Target Did Not Use	Used
Told	37.5% (32)	96.4%** (56)	55.6% (18)	100.0%* (23)
Other Told	73.5% (83)	100.0% (5)	79.0% (38)	100.0% (3)
Participated	66.1% (59)	93.1%** (29)	79.0% (38)	100.0% (3)
Noticed	63.5% (52)	91.7%** (36)	78.1% (32)	88.9% (9)
Read	73.2% (82)	100.0% (6)	80.5% (41)	--- (0)
Knows	71.9% (64)	83.3% (24)	78.6% (28)	84.6% (13)

Note: Shaded cells indicate modes used by less than 10% of the pairs. Numbers in parentheses are the base N's for the percentages.

** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ + $p < .10$

Table 6. Relationship Characteristics and the Completeness and Accuracy of Proxy Reporting of Youth and Adult Job Search.

Relationship Characteristic	Completeness			
	Adult Target Low	High	Youth Target Low	High
Weekend Time	80.0%	76.9%	57.1%	80.7%+
Weekday Time	80.7%	74.1%	68.8%	75.9%
Activities	76.3%	80.4%	66.7%	77.8%

Relationship Characteristic	Accuracy			
	Adult Target Low	High	Youth Target Low	High
Weekend Time	72.0%	79.0%	61.5%	89.3%*
Weekday Time	74.2%	76.9%	68.8%	88.0%
Activities	67.4%	82.2%	66.7%	91.3%*

** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ + $p < .10$